

**Sir Oliver Lodge, Psychical Researcher and Scientist.**

W. P. Jolly. 256 pp. Fairleigh Dickinson University, Cranbury, NJ, 1975. Price: \$10.00. (Reviewed by J. Z. Buchwald.)

Oliver Lodge was among the most widely known of British physical scientists during the years between 1890 and his death in 1940. Born in 1851, the son of a man determined that he should enter the family clay-selling business, Lodge began to attend courses at the Wedgwood Institute in 1867 while working for his father. By 1874 he had entered University College in London, and there his scientific career first took on a definitive character. Lodge's earliest work involved organic chemistry. However, by 1881, when he was appointed to the new University College in Liverpool, his interests had turned to electrical studies, an area which he termed "the fascinating, the gigantic science of Electricity and Magnetism." Yet the source of Lodge's public fame is not his scientific work. While of some importance for the development of British electromagnetic theory during the 1880s and early 1890s, his researches were not of so striking a kind as to capture a wide audience. Lodge's fame—some at the time would have said his notoriety—derived from a combination of his outstanding expository abilities with the fact that from the early 1880s until his death he was among the foremost proponents of research into psychical phenomena.

Lodge was not alone in his interest in psychic subjects. By 1884 the Society for Psychical Research, then two years old, could count among its members some of the foremost men in Britain: William Crookes, J. J. Thomson, Arthur Balfour, Lord Rayleigh, Balfour Stewart, Ruskin, Tennyson, and Lewis Carroll. Indeed, the 1880s and 1890s constitute a period of intense British interest in thought transference and life after death. Controversies raged for months in reputable papers such as *The Times* over the details of the numerous experiments then being performed. It is in the treatment of this aspect of Lodge's career that Professor Jolly's book is the most successful. He gives a fascinating account of Lodge's involvement in

psychic researches; of especial interest is the period immediately following World War I during which Lodge attempted to contact his son, Raymond, who had been killed in trench warfare. In *Raymond, or Life and Death*, published in 1916, Lodge recounted the story of his first attempts at contact. It was a work at once of psychic research and, as Professor Jolly notes, of philosophy. Certainly, it was one of the most successful books of the day, perhaps because of the hopes it aroused among those whose friends and relatives had also died in the trenches.

*Raymond*, as well as Lodge's many other articles and books on psychic phenomena, was the work neither of a crackpot nor of a once-intelligent scientist gone to seed. Lodge's research in this area was contemporary with his scientific activities and did not follow upon a period of declining mental powers. Indeed, it would be extremely interesting to know what links Lodge's conceptions of the dynamical ether—a very particular kind of a medium then at the basis of British electromagnetic theory—with his belief in another ethereal medium that mediates psychic phenomena and is, perhaps, the seat of an immaterial mode of existence. It is interesting to note that Lodge's picture of the physical ether, once specific enough for him to provide one of the more famous of the British ether models that came into vogue for a very short period between 1884 and 1888, changed with time. By 1897 he had come to think even of the electromagnetic medium as a distinctly immaterial entity. One of Lodge's most famous experiments demonstrated in that year that any kind of a mechanical connection between ether and matter is extremely unlikely. One wonders whether Lodge's growing belief in the immaterial medium of psychic phenomena influenced his thoughts on physical subjects. Unfortunately, Professor Jolly fails us here. While highly sensitive to the details of Lodge's personal life and influence, he clearly does not have a detailed enough knowledge of British science of the time to be of much help in elucidating this important issue.

The scientific and psychical researches were but two facets of Lodge's many-sided career. He was also a noted social reformer, the first Principal of, and a strong

propagandist for, Birmingham University, and the inventor of a number of devices subsequently used in wireless telegraphy (among these was the Lodge coherer employed by Marconi). Each of these subjects is well treated. Unlike many modern biographers of scientists, Professor Jolly has a stylistic flair which consistently holds the reader's attention and leads him with interest from episode to episode. As a short and attractive account of the high points in the career of one of the most interesting among British scientists of the period, the book is eminently successful. If, however, one seeks an illuminating analysis of Lodge's scientific work, then he will not find it here. Professor Jolly has neither written a scientific

biography, nor has he provided a very deep insight into Lodge's motivations (for example, was there a relationship between Lodge's spiritual beliefs and his youthful sexual fantasies?). Nonetheless, anyone who has the slightest interest in the context of British physics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries will find this biography both useful and entertaining.

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